

Delaware Health Officials Support 'No Alcohol During Pregnancy' Report

DOVER – How much alcohol is safe to drink when you're expecting? None. Zero. Not a drop. That's according to a report just published in the November issue of the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) Pediatrics magazine. The report identifies prenatal alcohol exposure as the leading cause of preventable birth defects and neurodevelopmental disabilities.

Drinking during pregnancy greatly increases the chances that the baby will develop a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Signs and symptoms of the various FASDs range from mild to severe and include a combination of physical, emotional, behavioral, and learning problems. Prenatal alcohol exposure is a frequent cause of structural or functional effects on the brain, heart, bones and spine, kidneys, vision and hearing. It's also associated with a higher incidence of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and specific learning disabilities such as difficulties with mathematics and language, information processing, memory, and problem solving.

"We wholeheartedly support the AAP's announcement regarding no alcohol use during pregnancy," said Dr. Karyl Rattay, Director of the Division of Public Health (DPH). "The only sure way to prevent FASDs is to completely avoid alcohol use while pregnant. This also applies to women who are trying to get conceive. Damage from prenatal alcohol exposure can occur even during the earliest weeks of pregnancy, even before a woman realizes she's pregnant."

"It is vital for those of us in the pediatric community to deliver this very important message," said Dr. Catherine Zorc, President of the Delaware Chapter of the American Academy of

Pediatrics. "We appreciate this clear guidance to help us correct misunderstandings about the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy and to educate on the importance of abstaining from alcohol use during this critical time in their child's development."

Some physicians have advised pregnant women that it may be acceptable to consume limited quantities of alcohol during their third trimester. However the AAP report disputes that logic. First-trimester drinking, compared to no drinking, results in 12 times the odds of giving birth to a child with FASDs. First- and second-trimester drinking increased FASDs odds 61 times, and women who drink during all trimesters were 65 more likely to have children who would develop an FASD.

"Alcoholism can make it much more difficult for a pregnant woman to quit drinking altogether," said Michael Barbieri, Director of the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH). "Many women may be able to cease casual drinking easily but we must remember that alcohol addiction is still very real and very difficult to overcome. DSAMH is working closely with providers to increase the amount of addiction treatment services, including to pregnant women."

The Department of Health and Social Services has begun a pregnancy and addiction project led by the Secretary's office, DPH, DSAMH and the newly re-formed FASD Task Force. DHSS and the Task Force are currently reviewing available education, diagnosis, and treatment services for reproductive age women with the goal of increasing women and medical provider awareness of the dangers of alcohol and drugs during a pregnancy, and developing additional information on identifying FASD symptoms early in infants and young children. Neurocognitive and behavioral problems from prenatal alcohol exposure are lifelong, but early recognition, diagnosis and therapy for any FASD condition can improve a child's long term prospects and overall health.

For further information about the project or the FASD Task Force, call 302-744-4704. And for tips for a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby, visit <http://dethrives.com/healthy-mothers>. If you're a mother struggling with addiction, visit <http://www.helpisherede.com/> for local resources.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>. Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.

About the American Academy of Pediatrics

The AAP is a professional membership organization of 64,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical sub-specialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. Its mission is to attain optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents and young adults.